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ABSTRACT

Arguing that our democratic society needs citizens with advanced language and thinking skills, this paper invites readers to take part in a Literacy Compact in their communities. It first discusses what a Literacy Compact is, describing it as a pact between students, English language arts teachers, parents, school administrators, and communities to work together to improve English language arts learning in their schools. It then briefly discusses the Standards for the English Language Arts defined by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, and the broad goals it holds for students. The next section offers a model Literacy Compact that outlines specific pledges of action for students, English language arts teachers, parents, school administrators, and communities. Two resources to help start a Literacy Compact are noted at the end of the document. (SR)

Achieving High English Language Arts Standards: A Call to Join the Literacy Compact

Presented by
The National Council of Teachers of English

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Achieving High English Language Arts Standards:

A CALL TO JOIN THE LITERACY COMPACT

Presented by the National Council of Teachers of English

What is a Literacy Compact?

The Literacy Compact is a promise to our students' future. To survive and flourish in the twenty-first century, our democratic society needs citizens with advanced language and thinking skills. But just setting high English language arts standards is not enough. All of us--students, teachers, parents, school administrators, businesspeople, and civic leaders--must work together to give today's students the opportunity and the desire to achieve those standards.

We invite you to take part in a Literacy Compact in your community. Too often people would like to help their local schools, but they don't know what they can do or that their help is needed. The Literacy Compact event is an opportunity to rally that support and put it to work.

Your Literacy Compact event will give participants a chance to hear different perspectives and to discuss ways that they can work together in the future. By creating and signing a Literacy Compact, participants commit to improving English language arts learning in their local schools.

This brochure introduces the Standards for the English Language Arts and provides a model Literacy Compact. For resources to help you start your own Compact, see the end of this document.

What are the English language arts standards?

Standards for the English Language Arts (National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, 1996) stress that students must be capable readers and writers. As they grow as readers, students must learn and develop effective reading strategies for tackling challenging materials. They must organize their ideas logically and write and speak clearly and effectively.

But NCTE and IRA also recognize that our definition of "basic" literacy must be expanded if students are to lead responsible, satisfying lives in the twenty-first century.

Students must have experience writing to real readers for real purposes so that they are equally capable of writing a research report, a friendly e-mail message, or a letter to the editor.

Students must read often, interpreting and evaluating a broad range of classic and contemporary literature. They should also be active, critical users of media and technology.

The standards emphasize that students must be able to communicate effectively in many different situations, including those requiring standard English. Many students may speak more than one language; these students should use their literacy in their first language to build literacy in English, while continuing to develop expertise in their first language.

As they answer questions and explore issues, students must be able to find many sources of information. Students should know how to evaluate information, summarize it, and communicate their conclusions clearly to others. They should work successfully in teams, using their language skills to solve problems. And, most important, students should use their English language arts education to become lifelong learners.

We all want America's children to succeed. Working together, we can help all children reach high standards for the English language arts.

--Beverly Ann Chin, NCTE President, 1995-96

The Literacy Compact

Students prepare for the twenty-first century by taking responsibility for their own learning.

Students pledge to . . .

- work to achieve the literacy goals outlined in Standards for the English Language Arts.
- be thoughtful, persistent learners.
- reflect on how they learn, discovering which habits and strategies work best for them.
- treat their classmates with respect and encourage one another to learn.
- work productively with others, using their language skills to solve problems.
- see school as one of many sites for learning.

English language arts teachers prepare students for the twenty-first century by challenging them to reach new levels of literacy.

Teachers pledge to . . .

- provide students with the full range of literacy experiences described in Standards for the English Language Arts.
- challenge students to work hard and aim high.
- expand their knowledge through professional development and teacher research.
- collaborate with parents, students, administrators, and communities to improve learning.

Parents prepare their children for lifelong success by showing them the power of literacy in everyday life.

Parents pledge to . . .

- read with their children often and give them access to a wide variety of interesting reading materials, such as books, magazines, and newspapers.
- write with their children, showing them the many everyday uses of writing. Parents encourage their children to share the writing they do on their own, in school, and outside of school.
- encourage their children to be curious about the world around them.
- help their children learn computer communication skills by using computers at home or by seeking out public access to technology.
- talk with their children about the media they use, including film, television, video, music, and computers, and challenge them to think critically about these forms of communication.
- demonstrate teamwork for their children and encourage their children to develop language skills as they work with others toward a common goal.
- demonstrate and encourage awareness of and respect for language variations.
- show their children how they learn new skills and adapt to new experiences.

School administrators prepare students by giving them the tools and resources they need to succeed.

School administrators pledge to . . .

- provide students with safe, well-equipped schools.
- employ knowledgeable, caring teachers.
- keep class sizes small to ensure that students get individual attention and frequent opportunities to write.
- give students and teachers access to the writing tools of the future: word processors, online networks, and computer software.
- stay informed about the teaching and learning experiences going on in their schools.
- promote teamwork by providing students with opportunities to use their literacy skills collaboratively--for example, by planning school activities or by writing letters and proposals to solve school problems.
- help teachers keep current by providing on-going opportunities for professional development and teacher research.
- collaborate with teachers, parents, students, and communities to improve learning.

Communities prepare students for rewarding work and responsible participation in our democratic society by providing schools and students with essential resources.

Communities pledge to . . .

- ensure that education is well-funded so that all students attend safe, well-equipped schools that are adequately staffed with well-qualified teachers.
- educate themselves about the teaching and learning experiences going on at their local schools.
- provide rich reading resources in their libraries and schools, including a wide range of literary and informational works, both classic and contemporary. Communities must provide resources for research, including books, periodicals, databases, CD-ROMs, and Internet search tools.

- involve students in community projects in which students research issues and present their findings.
- draw on the ethnic and social differences within them as resources for teaching, learning, and community enrichment.
- promote lifelong learning by celebrating student achievements and by sponsoring community events at which learners of all ages work together.

Parent & Community Resources from NCTE

To order, call: 1-800-369-6283.

Parent's Guide to Literacy for the 21st Century

Pre-K through Grade 5

by Janie Hydrick

Written by a parent who is also an award-winning teacher, *Parent's Guide to Literacy for the 21st Century* uses clear, everyday language and classroom examples to explain key literacy concepts. A variety of fun and practical activities are suggested for parents to do at home with their children. 97 pp. 1996. ISBN 0-8141-4688-0. Stock No. 46880. \$11.95 nonmembers, \$8.95 NCTE members, plus s/h.

Literacy Compact Organizing Kit

This kit contains everything you need to organize a Literacy Compact event:

- a wall-size Literacy Compact poster,
- 26-page handbook on organizing and publicizing the event,
- *Parent's Guide to Literacy for the 21st Century*,
- Professional Summary of *Standards for the English Language Arts*, additional copies of the Literacy Compact brochure, and
- related NCTE brochures on teaching and learning.

Stock No. 29706. \$16.00 nonmembers, \$12.00 NCTE members, plus shipping and handling.

The **National Council of Teachers of English** is dedicated to improving the teaching and learning of the English language arts at all levels of education. Single copies of this statement (no.29749) are free upon request and may be copied without permission.